UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

PROVISIONAL

E/1994/SR.26
14 February 1995
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

Substantive session of 1994

Coordination segment

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 26th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 11 July 1994, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. BOTEZ (Romania)
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF HIS EXCELLENCE MR. KIM IL SUNG, PRESIDENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES: (continued)

(a) SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (continued)

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, Office of Conference Services, room DC2-794, 2 United Nations Plaza.

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF HIS EXCELLENCE MR. KIM IL SUNG, PRESIDENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

At the invitation of the President, the members of the Economic and Social Council observed a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of His Excellency Mr. Kim Il Sung, President of the Democratic People's Republic of Korean.

Mr. KIM (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) paid tribute to the memory of His Excellency Mr. Kim Il Sung.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES: (continued) (A/49/204-E/1994/90 and A/49/205-E/1994/91)

(a) SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (continued) (E/1994/70)

Mr. OBASI (Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization) said that, in view of the increasing world population and the indiscriminate use of natural resources, the current development process would be unsound and unsustainable unless appropriate and timely measures were adopted. Only a new pattern of development based on concern for the weaker sectors of humanity and the environment could halt that trend. Environmental protection required the deliberate and rational integration of science and technology into all development processes. To that end, it was necessary to take into account the coordination mechanisms that had evolved since the adoption of the Vienna Programme of Action on Science and Technology for Development, recent advances in science and technology, especially in computers, satellites and biotechnology, and the new needs of mankind, as reflected in the action programmes adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and the World Conference on Natural

Disaster Reduction, as well as recommendations that would emerge from the World Summit for Social Development and the International Conference on Population and Development. Such recommendations would lead to the setting of new priorities for socio-economic development, making it necessary to re-examine the existing coordination mechanisms.

Effective coordination required a three-tiered approach, namely, at the level of countries, agencies or programmes, and the United Nations system as a whole. Coordination at the national level was of paramount importance, as it determined the effective participation of Member States in the formulation of appropriate and coordinated policies and strategies for the Organization.

In some science and technology sectors, effective coordination at the national level was often lacking. For example, according to a survey carried out by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), many countries had established separate national committees to deal with climate and environmental issues; however, in many cases, the competent institutions, such as national weather services, had not been consulted in the formulation of national development and environmental plans, as called for in Agenda 21. Government authorities should review their approach with a view to ensuring optimum use of available expertise and resources through appropriate coordination mechanisms at the national level.

With regard to coordination involving United Nations agencies or programmes, each agency had set up its own coordination mechanisms for the formulation and implementation of its programmes and activities. There, too, the primary link was with the relevant national institutions of ministries designated by Member States. Experience showed that shortcomings were due mainly to ineffective national coordination, especially when the subject-matter cut across the mandates of several national ministries. A good example of a success story was the WMO World Climate Programme. An advisory panel had been established by all the United Nations agencies concerned and the International Council of Scientific Unions; its task was to advise and guide all aspects of the preparation of an integrated proposal on the Programme, to

include national programmes and activities and those of the United Nations system.

Within the United Nations system, the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) and its sectoral mechanisms were responsible for the coordinating programmes and agencies. While the Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development coordinated activities relating to the implementation of Agenda 21, no such mechanism had been established for the Commission on Science and Technology for Development.

Improved coordination at each of the three levels would undoubtedly contribute to optimum use of national and international expertise and technology, provided that the necessary resources were also made available. For example, if development projects were to be environmentally sound and sustainable, national meteorological and hydrological services should participate in their planning and execution. It was encouraging to note that donors were increasingly attaching importance to the environmental dimension of large-scale development projects.

Nevertheless, the funds allocated to the science and technology sector by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which was the main funding source for such activities within the United Nations system, had decreased. Priority and resources must be assigned to that sector if it was to make its proper contribution to environmentally sound and sustainable development. Moreover, scientific and technical agencies such as WMO, which had a comparative advantage in various sectors, should be consulted in respect of the preparation of UNDP country strategy notes and World Bank reports. Such consultations would ensure that the science and technology sector was not overlooked in the funding of development projects.

In order to ensure effective coordination, ACC should establish a science and technology subcommittee; executive heads of agencies should be invited to make presentations to the Economic and Social Council or the Commission on Science and Technology for Development in their respective fields of competence.

Mr. AHMED (International labour Organization (ILO)) said that there was overwhelming evidence that the systematic destruction of the sustainable livelihoods of indigenous peoples was a consequence of environmental degradation which, in turn, resulted from distorted incentive structures and institutional biases. The evidence gathered by ILO suggested that sustainable livelihoods in ecologically fragile areas inhabited by poor people could be promoted through appropriate environmental conservation technologies.

With regard to the effort to achieve cleaner industrial production, the available data indicated that costs of compliance with anti-pollution measures did not significantly impair the economic viability or international competitiveness of polluting industries. In that connection, closer coordination between the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the Commission on Sustainable Development would be fruitful. ILO could foster such linkages through the task manager of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development project on the transfer of environmentally sound technologies.

Stressing the importance of coordinated efforts in biotechnology, he said that, as shown by the ILO contribution to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) report on system activities in biotechnology, newly emerging biotechnologies had both positive and negative aspects for the poor. The United Nations system would have to make coordinated efforts to eliminate the legal and financial barriers to access by developing countries to socially beneficial biotechnologies.

ILO had endeavoured to integrate research, policy-making and project execution by establishing multidisciplinary teams to advise constituents, drawing on the expertise gained and the database established through research; that would facilitate inter-agency coordination, particularly at the country level.

With regard to locally produced technologies, ILO grass-roots programmes, which fostered linkages among end-users, commercial suppliers and

national institutions for training, credit and marketing channels, had led to more economically viable and sustainable technology use. In that area, too, United Nations system-wide cooperation at the country level would be needed.

Market liberalization, financial deregulation and privatization had contributed to the technology-driven globalization of production. The United Nations system must deal in a concerted and coordinated fashion with the international division of labour and the consequences of the global redistribution of income.

ILO had actively participated in the panels on gender and basic needs of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development. It was clear that women employed in clerical and routine tasks in the services sector were the most vulnerable to health problems caused by new technologies. ILO had documented the adverse health effects of video display terminals and had prepared guidelines in that area. Its contribution to the panel on that issue would also include strategies to prepare working women for new occupational structures. With regard to basic needs, ILO would address the question of why there did not appear to be a significant correlation between the level and growth of incomes and satisfaction of the basic needs of the poor, particularly in Africa.

The issue of endogenous capacity-building in science and technology had been one of the pillars of the Vienna Programme of Action. ILO suggested that capacity-building involved the nurturing of individual skills, the promotion of effective organizations and the application of those skills to specific ends. The issue could pose a dilemma for policy makers, as it might involve a trade-off between current and future output and employment levels.

Mr. BELHIMEUR (Algeria) said that in view of its importance, the issue of resources should be included in the document to be submitted to the Council for adoption. Referring to the period subsequent to the abolition of the Task Force on Science and Technology for Development, whose functions, as noted in the Secretary-General's report, had been absorbed partly by the Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD), with respect to the

science and technology aspects of Agenda 21, and by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ), he said that the issue of a single inter-agency coordination structure should be clarified, since no replies had yet been received. Concerning the division of labour between the Commission on Transnational Corporations and the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, he referred to paragraph 65 of the Secretary-General's report, which stated that UNCTAD was now the secretariat of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and that the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development was responsible for the coordination of inputs. Since no assessments had been made of the issue thus far, he wondered whether the representatives of UNCTAD and the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development could comment on the matter. Since some members of the Group of 77 had raised the issue of South-South cooperation in the context of science and technology, he wished to know whether the United Nations system intended to address the issue, which had not been included in the Secretary-General's report.

Mr. KHAN (Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) said that since the abolition of the Task Force on Science and Technology for Development, IACSD had been responsible for coordinating tasks within the United Nations system with respect to the implementation of Agenda 21, and CCPOQ dealt with issues of science and technology in general, and operational activities of the system at the national level in particular, as well as with the coordination between the various programmes relating to science and technology.

Mr. FLANDERS (Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development) observed that UNCTAD provided substantive support to the Commission on Science and Technology for Development. The Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development was responsible for coordinating the activities of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the Commission on Sustainable development. It also participated actively in the meetings of the Bureau of the Commission on

Science and Technology for Development and provided, in particular, substantive support to a panel of the latter Commission responsible for preparing a report for the Commission on Sustainable Development. There were also ongoing fruitful consultations between the Department and UNCTAD.

Mr. BELHIMEUR (Algeria) said that he would appreciate some clarification concerning the scope of the secretariat services currently provided by UNCTAD to the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the Commission on Transnational Corporations. He wished to know whether those services were simply technical and operational such as the provisions of interpretation services, or covered other types of services as well.

Mr. ROFFE (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)) said that UNCTAD worked closely with the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and expressed gratitude for the support provided by specialized agencies, especially ILO, UNIDO, UNESCO and WHO, to the panels established by the Commission on Science and Technology for Development. Concerning the division of labour, he referred to paragraph 65 of the Secretary-General's report, describing what had happened since the restructuring of the United Nations in the economic and social sectors, and noted that the action undertaken by the Secretariat had been in accordance with the General Assembly's guidelines concerning the restructuring of the Secretariat in the area of science and technology. UNCTAD maintained excellent cooperation with the Department and, despite existing constraints, excellent results were being achieved. The substantive support provided to the Commission, including helping with the preparations for the work of various panels established by the Commission and the various activities of the programme of work was worth noting. In particular, the Department provided special support to the panels on sustainable development. However, restructuring had caused a number of problems and the UNCTAD secretariat was preparing a report thereon for submission to the Fifth Committee. As far as the work of the Commission on Transnational Corporations in the area of science and technology was concerned, he noted that although the Commission

had conducted work in the area of transfer of technology it was not entrusted with a specific role in that area. As to South-South cooperation in the area of science and technology, UNCTAD was seeking to strengthen the links among research and development institutions in developing countries; if it had the necessary resources, it would be able to do much more in that area.

Mr. CLAVIJO (Colombia) said that the functions relating to science and technology for development were broad and could not be restricted to the issue of the environment alone. The coordination of activities between the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Commission on Science and Technology for Development should be enhanced and the respective mandates of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and UNCTAD should be clarified. That was very important as far as resources were concerned. The problems facing science and technology for development activities had to do with the allocation of resources and were not of an institutional nature. While environmental issues were important, Colombia felt that they should not absorb all the attention of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The resources earmarked for UNCTAD activities should be allocated in a rational way since the proper allocation of resources for the execution of programmes in the field would benefit the developing countries.

Mr. BIONTINO (Germany), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that coordination was needed not only at the national, local and regional levels but also throughout the system. Sectoral issues should be harmonized and integrated in order to coordinate science and technology activities throughout the system. He suggested that within the framework of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, sectoral issues should be coordinated by the respective task managers and that UNCTAD should be responsible for their integration. Such integration and coordination should not be limited to environmentally-sound technology, but should also cover all activities in the field of science and technology.

Ms. WILLIAMS-MANIGAULT (United States of America) said it was important to consider the comparative advantages that various sectors of society could offer in the area of science and technology and, concerning the coordination of United Nations activities system-wide in that area, it was necessary to determine which measures were most appropriate. Science and technology could not be discussed in isolation, for the issue required specific sector-by-sector treatment in order not to lose sight of the purpose of the technology to be transferred nor of ways of promoting development. Project heads should seek a clear formulation of the programmes approved for implementation.

Mr. CLAVIJO (Colombia) said that in preparing the document to be considered, the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Relationship between Investment and Technology Transfer should be taken into account, since they dealt specifically with the treatment of the issue system-wide and had been endorsed by UNCTAD.

Mr. VENKATARAMAN (United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)), referring to the transfer of technology, said that the UNIDO secretariat had participated in the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group and had drawn its attention to ongoing activities undertaken by various organizations, including UNIDO, in that area. The issue of coordination in that field was different from coordination in the area of science and technology in general and should be kept separate. He also recalled that the UNIDO statement had mentioned the need to examine the issue of technology together with topics such as investment viability studies and others that made up the many sectoral activities and that delegations should bear that in mind in adopting decisions on the issue. He had also listened with interest to the comments of the representative of Germany, speaking on behalf of the European Union, and the representative of the United States concerning the importance of sectoral activities and the need to consider certain aspects relating to the transfer of technology and investment from the sectoral viewpoint. He therefore hoped that a distinction would be made between the issue of

coordination in the area of science and technology in general and the issue of coordination of specific aspects such as the transfer of technology and investment.

Mr. KHAN (Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development), referring to the proposal put forward by the representative of Germany concerning the mandate of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, said that currently that mandate was confined to the implementation of Agenda 21 and specifically, to the consideration of science and technology issues, while task managers were responsible for the coordination and formulation of programmes relating to the execution of Agenda 21 on behalf of the Inter-Agency Committee. Therefore, if the Council felt that the proposal of the Germany delegation was the best approach and recommended that it should be approved, that would mean that the mandates of the Inter-Agency Committee and of the task managers would have to be expanded or amended and the Administrative Committee on Coordination would have to adopt that approach, which in turn would have an impact on the other bodies of the Administrative Committee, particularly the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.